DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 563 HE 018 160

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TITLE The Best System: Black Academic and Cultural Retention (Save the Children).
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 24p.
AVAILABLE FROM Panfre Productions, P.O. Box 77, Frostburg, MD 21532 ($2.50).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; Academic Persistence; *Black Culture; *Black Students; Black Studies; *College Students; Counseling Objectives; Cultural Pluralism; Higher Education; Racial Identification; School Counseling; *School Holding Power; Social Structure; State Colleges; Student Development; *Student Organizations; World Affairs
IDENTIFIERS *Frostburg State College MD

ABSTRACT

Assumptions concerning the American education system and its social structure and implications for blacks are discussed, and a Frostburg State College program that addresses academic and cultural retention issues for black students is described. This program, the Best System, includes features such as: offering black cultural history; using nontraditional admissions criteria; developmental academic advising and counseling, focusing on students' academic, social, and psychological needs; using competency-based tests that reflect student potential; advising black student organizations; and promoting campus/community human relations activities. The Best System addresses the realities of elitism, cultural monism, and world Americanization that are inherent in America's neocolonial education system. The system is based on a philosophy of internal separatism/external integration, which involves: (1) a spirit of black collectivism and unity; (2) cultural pluralism; and (3) internationalism, which entails a knowledge of international political realities and a sense of camaraderie of color to promote world humanization. Specific attention is directed to the following components of the Best System: academic advising/counseling and student organization advising. (SW)

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THE BEST SYSTEM:

BLACK ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL RETENTION

(SAVE THE CHILDREN)

Our children are dying
with smiles on their faces
while we price headstones
to celebrate the closing of their eyes.

from "*Terminal Acculturation*"
- Fred Lee Hord

Pansye S. Atkinson
Frederick L. Hord

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FINAL EDITION

In 1930, at Howard University, W. E. B. Dubois warned the graduating seniors, "The average Negro undergraduate has swallowed hook, line, and sinker, the dead bait of the white undergraduate, who, born in an industrial machine, does not have to think, and does not think . . . . The greatest meetings of the Negro college year like those of the white college year have become vulgar exhibitions of liquor, extravagance, and fur coats."[1] Three years later, Carter G. Woodson published Mis-education of the Negro, and wrote, "The large majority of the Negroes who have put on the finishing touches of our best colleges are all but worthless in the development of their people . . . . Taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature, and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of the oppressor."[2] Today, more than a half century later, the words of these two education prophets are even more axiomatic. For Dubois' inflated "talented tenth" have been "swept on and into the great maelstrom of the white civilization surrounding us,"[3] and Woodson's miseducated Negroes "unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor."[4]

Looking back over those more than 50 years of the American neo-colonial education system for contributing factors to the increase of what the authors call *interior colonialism*--that

employment of Black minds to reproduce cultural goods for the benefit of the dominant elite (the use of Black minds against Black people)--two phenomena stand out: the Brown v. Board of Education - Topeka Supreme Court decision of 1954 and the preemption of Black student protest of the 1960's. Blacks and Whites sat down together, and now descend together. For integrated public schools and integrated higher education have further integrated the value system of the integrator into Black children; and in the 1980's, these schools are further disintegrating Black children's sense of academic internal control--the expectation that academic efforts will pay academic dividends. The problem? The nature of American education.

In spite of the fact that the American neo-colonial education system reflects and reinforces this racist/sexist/capitalist society, it has been used to delude Blacks into believing that it is the answer to the American dream. From the education of nominally free Blacks before the Civil War to the education of nominally free Blacks since the last Civil Rights War, the myth has been perpetuated that school doors are the gates to actual freedom. The last two major campaigns, Brown-Topeka and the Black Student Protest, have been victories claimed but not victories won. In truth, Brown led to the illusion of the approaching coup de grace to segregation and the imminence of the integrated millenium, and also to two costly maneuvers: 1) the Black strategy to deracialize defenses, and 2) the reinforcement of Black mental guards with faith in American education as the Appomattox for equality. Fortunately, the

Brown engagement was put into proper perspective for some by the resistant forces of White economic and psychological privilege; and so the angry young Black shock troops attacked the citadel of White higher education.

But this Black Student Protest encounter was waged by young idealists who had barely seen the boot camps of race/sex/class consciousness. Thus, because this was no war--only a rally for reform, these idealists were let in, being disarmed by their own revolutionary accouterments. The territory of Black faith in education was secure again, now that most students thought that they had won revolutionary victories. The real revolutionaries were repelled but, hopefully, are quietly gathering combatants for the next siege.

There is no mystery about why or how the last struggle was preempted, or why the present legacy for Blacks is curtailed enrollment, unrestrained attrition, and financial cutbacks, with the promise of heightened elitism ahead. Neither is there a mystery about why so many Black children are being lost to the same set of values that enslaved their forebears. Every education system functions to perpetuate the larger society by acculturating its young into that order, and the purpose of the American neo-colonial education system is to maintain the American societal structure. Its claims of individual freedom, cultural pluralism, and world democratization obscure its ideologies of elitism, cultural monism, and world Americanization; and Black children are the acculturated victims. The authors submit the following definition of terms:

Elitism: Those who achieve or fail to achieve self-realization--the aggrandizement of status and material wealth--are responsible for their own success or failure.

Cultural Monism: Anglo-Saxon cultural production and values represent standards by which to measure all cultural production and values.

World Americanization: This is elitism at the national level--the idea that the hegemony of the United States over other nations is a consequence of this country's being the fittest.

These structural realities contribute to the academic and cultural retention problems of Black students. Before they come to college, miseducated to believe in the American myth of individual freedom and that one is thus responsible for one's own success or failure, Black students often question their own intelligence when they do not succeed in school. In addition, misguided efforts of recent so-called experts--from the halls of ivy--to correct failure, by issuing untrammeled freedom to academicians and students alike, have compounded the problem, absolving the American neo-colonial education system of both responsibility and blame. Further, lulled by the rhetoric of cultural pluralism to ignore the realities of cultural monism, Black students see little of their own culture related to academic life, and/or they see that culture in ways that are either negative or foreign, provoking more questions about their own adequacy. Finally, the propaganda of world democratization suggests an America which has created and/or preserved the

freedom of people everywhere, projecting at the domestic level a society that provides everyone an equal chance to learn. Thus, if Black students survive public schools, with the attendant racialistic discouragement and/or paternalistic praise, they often carry battered academic internal control into higher education, which is compounded by a facade of confidence, underdeveloped skills, and a consciousness that has abosorbed many of the ideologies. In college, elitism, cultural monism, and world Americanization are masked with even more sophistication, and the assaults persist. Black students who academically survive higher education are often negatively affected by these structural realities; and such effects foster false class-consciousness, identity confusion, and unwitting identification with American internal colonialism[5] and imperialism.

Therefore, what must be prevented are not only the academic casualties of Black students, but also cultural casualties. If Black students continue to suffer attrition aggravated by lack of academic internal control, there will be individual and collective socioeconomic losses and a potential collective loss of Black leadership; and the myths of genetic and/or motivative inferiority--with consequent attribution of Black blame for Black socioeconomic conditions--will be perpetuated. If Black student acculturation continues to increase and Black students become more imbued with elitist notions, ideas of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority, and images of an America that safeguards the liberties of the peoples of the world, there will be individual spiritual losses of identity and values and a collective racial disaster at two levels.

First, the rift between Black pseudoclasses in this society will widen, exacerbating unity problems and ultimately the cultural survival of the Black community. Second, the possibilities for eventual Black coalition with other oppressed people of color in the world will disappear. Blacks must not become the enemies of their own people in this country by serving as buffers, and they must not become agents of complicity in global subjugation by not understanding and contending with the fact that their ease is bought by the oppression of people elsewhere.

The authors staff the Office of Minority Affairs at a predominantly white institution--Frostburg State College (Maryland)--and believe that a program for Black student academic and cultural retention such as the one which has evolved at that institution over the past 16 years--which they have labelled The BEST System--can effect a philosophical nexus between all White and Black institutions for the academic and cultural retention of Black children. They further believe that such a linkage will strengthen the Black community in America and the oppressed community of color in the world in combined efforts toward humanization.

The Best System seeks toarrest the *interior colonialism* of Black students by attacking the structural ideologies which contribute to their academic and cultural attrition, using a Black perspective to contain and reverse acculturation while promoting academic internal control. By Black perspective, the authors mean an angle of vision from the vantage of the Black experience. The philosophical fulcrum of The Best System is *internal separatism/external integration*: the use of Black

cultural history as a framework for strengthening racial pride and values and for achieving individual and collective fulfillment while living and learning in White America. The BEST System confronts the American neo-colonial education system's structural realities of elitism, cultural monism, and world Americanization with the three components of *internal separatism/external integration:* 1) community - a spirit of Black collectivism, with its corollary of Black unity; 2) cultural pluralism - a state of society in which various races and ethnic groups maintain autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture, while sharing equitably in the larger society; 3) internationalism - a knowledge of international political realities and a sense of camaraderie of color for the purpose of world humanization.

The BEST System's realtive autonomy is indispensable in implementing the philosophy of *internal separatism/external integration.* Obviously, the Minority Affairs office is interested in its own and therefore motivated to enhance chances of Black student success. However, without the authority to execute its policies, such enthusiasm would amount to very little. Therefore, having a relatively autonomous staff (director and assistant director), aligned neither with Academic Affairs nor with Student Affairs but reporting directly to the President, is crucial to the coordination of different facets of the program. This structure also more readily assures compilation and interpretation of collective data, establishing the Office as campus expert on the Black student condition. With such latitude, the

Office assumes responsibility and accountability for the direction of the College's desegregation efforts.

Briefly, The BEST System incorporates the following elements:

1) Black Barometers - the use of nontraditional Admissions criteria along with SAT/ACT scores and high school grades and rank. This approach allows for uncovering hidden potential, and bringing in students who are community oriented, have positive self-concepts, and have some understanding of racism.
2) Environment - the promotion of healthy nonacademic correlates of Black student retention which impact upon academic success through (a) Black student-organization advising to encourage the "extended-self concept"[6] of community; and (b) the monitoring of and involvement in campus/community human relations activities.
3) Success - the promotion and monitoring of Black student internal control through (a) developmental academic advising/counseling/orientation; (b) aggressive cooperation with College faculty, staff, and support services to foster student development; and (c) fostering a culturally pluralistic learning environment through advising and cooperating with faculty and staff with regard to Black student academic, social, and psychological needs.
4) Testing - the use of periodic competency-based tests that reflect ability to learn and grow to determine retention,

rather than only testing the absorption of dominant culture information.

Frostburg's desegregation efforts began with 24 Black students in 1969. This college, in a remote corner of the State in a county of less thar 2% Black population, increased its Black student population to 8.5%--meeting the State's 1980 and 1985 goals for Frostburg well ahead of schedule.[7]

The Minority Affairs office has consistently compiled and monitored data on Black student progress and persistence since its institution in 1969. Data indicate that as of 1982, the average graduation rate for Black students since 1969 was 50%. In addition, Black student retention rates have generally exceeded non-black retention rates by 10 - 15%. Frostburg was cited by the Board of Trustees staff of the State Universities and Colleges as a result of the Maryland State Board for Higher Education's 1980 study on the retention of 1977 entering freshmen in the nine State public four-year institutions.[8] Frostburg's Black freshman student retention rate of 78.2% was the highest in the State for any students in any institution, including Frostburg's non-black students (69.6%). In 1978-79, 94.5% of entering Black freshmen at Frostburg returned, compared to 70% non-black. Overall, Black student freshman retention rates averaged 79% from 1975 through 1979. Of students lost, only 8% were lost due to academic dismissals.

However, a 1980 decision at Frostburg--influenced by the tendency of most Whites and some Blacks to interpret integration as assimilation--dealt a critical blow to Minority Affairs'

autonomy. The responsibility of initial Black freshman advising was removed from the Office, with disastrous results: Black freshman retention for 1980-81 and 1981-82 averaged only 66%.

In sum, the authors believe that Frostburg's Black student enrollment and retention success is due to The BEST System's relative autonomy as well as its philosophy of *internal separatism/external integration*.

Although all components of The BEST System are important, the authors will concentrate on the academic advising/counseling dimension of Success and the student-organization advising dimension of Environment because, in such a system, there is more autonomy exercised in these processes than in other phases.

Academic advising/counseling should be developmental, combining anticipating, mediating, and cultivating approaches to promote and monitor academic internal control, thus contributing to the *internal separatism/external integration* corrective of *interior colonialism*. The advisor/counselor--who might be called an academic strategist or engineer--should be a committed Black educator with a Black perspective. This person should have practical background experience in a broad range of the education of Black students, practical knowledge of the particular college system, and keen sensitivity to intangible non-academic manifestations--those peculiar to the Black student and those peculiar to the particular college environment.

Advising should be anticipating in two ways: 1) projecting the impact of the academic external controls of cultural monism that inhere in the American neo-colonial education

system, and 2) devising preventive behaviors and activities to avert academic problems. Advising should be mediating in two ways: 1) seeking to make Black students aware of the academic external controls of cultural monism, and 2) seeking to mitigate the academic external controls of the college experience. Advising should be cultivating, promoting self-help, in two ways: 1) attempting to use the students' academic and personality strengths and academic interests--combined with their knowledge of academic external controls--to master the college experience, and 2) being directional rather than nondirectional, for Black students need concrete guidance in the college experience. The primary goal of these three integral parts of academic advising is to increase the sense of academic internal control through improving academic self-concepts.

It is not that Black students suffer from poor general self-concepts; rather, their belief in individual freedom and its corollary of self-blame for educational failure, combined with the consequent inability to perceive the racist academic external controls of the American education experience, often results in unjustifiably low academic self-concepts. On the other hand, many Black students have inflated academic self-concepts because they have been poorly taught and/or rewarded for insignificant effort by public school teachers who expect no more.

In sum, academic internal control can be heightened by a realistic understanding and successful negotiation of the academic external controls involved. The understanding of these academic external controls in turn contributes to the goal of destroying *interior colonialism* by 1) clarifying the role of cultural

monism in this system, 2) demystifying education by divesting it of its cultural pluralism veneer; and thus, 3) exposing its relationship to interior colonialism.

When academic advising/counseling is developmental, it is also 1) nonstratifying; 2) holistic; 3) reality-based; 4) structured; and 5) success-oriented. First, students cannot be developed by stratifying them. Stratification based on economics or previous conditions of academic servitude is not congruent with the concept of community. Thus, The BEST System advising program serves as an umbrella for all entering Black freshmen, as well as most transfer students. These students are assigned to this ostensibly racially stratified program not to keep them apart from the general College community (and indeed, this does not occur), or because they are considered incapable, inferior or always initially in need of remediation. Rather, the premise is as follows:

1) The Black community has generally oriented its youth for and afforded them with a certain kind of developmental support during this critical period of the maturation process, while imposing certain demands. The BEST advising/counseling system is an extension of this tradition. It also helps to minimize for Black students, individually and collectively, the onus of bearing the responsibility for their own welfare,assisting them in coordinating their first-year college efforts. Black students in predominantly White institutions have too many battles to fight.

2) Diverse though they may be, Black students on a predominantly white campus are at a disadvantage because they are operating in a culturally monistic environment, and thus, are in need of social and psychological support. The program attempts to provide assistance to students--without undue search and delay on their part--in dealing realistically with this phenomenon, and seeks to help each achieve free interaction and self-reliance in the College community.

3) Determining academic, social, and psychological needs is an intricate task. The structure of the advising/counseling/orientation system provides an extended, coordinated screening process for students so that each may be afforded the kind of assistance and monitoring that each appears to warrant. This preventive but flexible approach allows a larger number of minimally prepared students to survive--to grow academically and socially--while better prepared students can thrive.

Although this arrangement arouses ire from most White and some Black staff, parents, and students, Black student resistance is seldom sustained for at least three reasons: 1) students acquire pride and status in identifying with a program that has fostered successful academic competition with Whites; 2) the Office serves as a home base which helps to negotiate the academic and social transition from high school; and 3) the Office is recognized as an important agent in the maintenance of a community within a community with the attendant security. These

three factors seem to outweigh any stigma of being connected to an all Black program, any fear of being different. Racial identity becomes a positive force. Black parents, faculty, and staff generally come to feel positively about the practice, if initially not about the principle, of the system. For most non-Black faculty and staff, the Office of Minority Affairs provides a center of reference for helping with the academic problems of Black students, as well as with personal and social problems that they encounter.

Second, academic advising/counseling should be holistic. The different academic and social experiences and the consequent attitudes that Black students bring to college cannot be disregarded. In addition, those students from predominantly White neighborhoods and schools often seem to own illusory academic and social perspectives, and life on a predominantly White campus seems to reinforce such views about education and identity. It is important that Black educators and students be aware of the academic advantages and disadvantages that have historically accrued to students from those same schools. Furthermore, holistic advising should aim at a non-fragmented college experience, recognizing the relationships between academic and non-academic variables of success.

Third, in order for academic advising/counseling to be developmental, it should be reality-based. Even though academic external controls may have affected public school performance, those records cannot be ignored. So it is important--while considering anticipated or apparent weaknesses--to initially

recommend courses that capitalize on past strengths, interests, and cognitive styles and defer required courses that correspond to vulnerabilities until remedial courses, tutoring, and advising/counseling shore up needed skills and attitudes. Not only is course placement important, instructor placement should be reality-based. Recommendations for instructors should correspond to information regarding their "Pygmalion" tendencies, permissiveness, paternalism, and teaching styles as well as overt racism. Moreover, advising/counseling should also foster student objective self-assessment, pointing the way to self-help and fulfillment.

Fourth, academic advising/counseling should be structured. From an orientation program which should provide a sense of belonging as well as an awareness of college expectations and support services, to an analysis of each student's record for academic success factors before transferring him/her to the major area advisor, it should be structured. Generally, Black students seem to require longer to adjust to college, but once adjusted, they seem to do at least as well as their White peers. Structured advising, with appropriate follow-up, should be continued until students declare a major and achieve academic stability. Once students are transferred to major advisors, advisors should provide periodic evaluations to Minority Affairs staff. Getting early-warning and other regular formal feedback from instructors and support services adds to preventive efforts.

Fifth, making advising/counseling success-oriented includes its being nonstratifying, holistic, reality-based, and structured--but, it means something more. An assessment of each student's academic and social strengths and weaknesses as well

as academic interests should suggest the sequence if not the nature of his/her four-year schedule. If Admissions has followed Black Barometers in recruiting, personality plusses may be as useful as academic ones in getting students off on the success foot. Not only will early prosperity genrally add to their coffers of academic self-concept, but there is sometimes specific transfer of confidence from strong academic and personality areas to weak academic onces. At least, with this method, students seem to exhibit more endurance in dealing with courses where previous records would not augur success. Success begets success.

The critical aspect of the Environment component of The BEST System is student-organization advising, which also contributes to *internal separatism/external integration*. It should foster an "extended-self concept" and make concrete the practicability of world humanization through Black educators-- significant others. Student-organization advising should use the advisors' credibility as significant others to make students aware of the elitism and world Americanization forces that inhere in American education and society, demystifying this system by divesting it of its veneer of individual freedom and world democratization and thus,exposing its relationship to *interior colonialism*.

The "extended-self concept" should be promoted by building a community within a community. Black students on a White campus need the reinforcement of other Blacks--the buffer of Black faces, the cushion of cultural style, and models in high places, but they need more. First, they require the environment of

caring so historically characteristic of Black schools. Different kinds of support--physical, emotional, and logistical--that can be provided in organization advising strengthen the sense of supportive concern that students already perceive in the academic advising/counseling relationship. Second, they need to love themselves, and for that, they must know themselves. Today, most seem to believe that they are just individuals "who happen to be Black" in a society where there is "the declining significance of race " and are total strangers to that extended family of Black students who plied and pried open the doors. Victims of victory!

Black students and Black educators on predominantly white campuses must work together to proudly preserve and promote Black culture and community. Kwanzaa; lectures and workshops on classic, internal, and scientific colonialism; Symposium on Black Women Writers; Jumpstreet Workshop; Black Gospel Choir functions; Black Parents Weekend; Black Sorority Scholarship Benefit--these are just a few of the recent cultural activities the authors have planned and/or participated in with student organizations at Frostburg. Another activity--peer-group academic support--that has been arranged with students not only helps to crystallize identity but demonstrates the practicability and practicality of the "extended-self concept." Yet, at the same time that *internal separatism* is being advanced by these operations, including the exigencies of Black leadership, *external integration* is being encouraged as Black students--with their additional visibility and status--become more

comfortable in functioning on the predominantly white campus, a microcosm of this society.

Two additional dimensions of student-organization advising engender *internal separatism* for Black students: providing "Encounter" experiences and international education. William E. Cross, Jr. has explained how an "Encounter"--a confrontation with racist contradictions in this society--can serve as a catalyst in the Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience for Black youth.[9] Further, Karen Dugger, in a 1981 Ph.D. dissertation at Kent State University, suggested that college students who learn that structural rather than individual factors are responsible for societal inequities are more likely to have their political consciousnesses radicalized.[10] Advising Black student organizations puts one in an optimum position to reveal the structural contradictions of race, sex, and class that obtain on a campus, and to illustrate how they relate to the larger society.

Risky? Yes. But indispensable to students' understanding of how the real world operates. Black educators cannot force *internal separatism*, but they can be instrumental in affording Black students the choice of humanism by opening their eyes to societal contradictions.

Finally, it is important to open the eyes of Black students to international affairs through student-organization advising. Black people approach the twenty-first century dangerously dumb about the mechanisms and machinations of international politics, especially about the involvement of this government--reflecting the interests of megabusinesses--in the oppression of people all over the world. The American neo-colonial education system shares in that complicity, because its purpose is to maintain the

present societal and global structures. For people of African descent not to know what is happening is to be ahistorical; not to care is to be iniquitous.

Black educators must, if necessary, put their jobs on the line to get their souls off the hook by making Black students aware of their political roles as new slaves, living off the fat of the lean of the world by not understanding and not resisting their *internal integration* into an imperalist society. And they must know that the power relations between the oppressors and the oppressed are changing; and if they choose to ally with the oppressors, their spiritual death is imminent, and the day of physical reckoning for them and their ilk is just a matter of time.

These are strong statements, but Blacks are strong people. At least, they were. The Brown decision, the Black student Protest movement, in fact, the entire historical preoccupation of Black people with education, must be used by Black educators to finally save Black children from *interior colonialism* by enlisting their minds on the side of freedom. Black educators can do no less. *External integration* is inescapable, necessary to eat and to see what is eating Black people up as a society. The problem of the twenty-first century, for Black people, will be the problem of *internal integration*. *Internal separatism* (*soul apartheid*, if you will) is the side of freedom.

As Lerone Bennett insists, Black people must unify their unifiers, for educators in a situation of oppression are either oppressors or liberators. He adds that Black knowledge must be

action, for European contemplative knowledge will be useless to Black survival.[11] The authors propose that Black educators at Black and at White institutions formalize linkages through education organizations, e.g., NAFEO (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education), NCBS (National Council for Black Studies), NABSE (National Alliance of Black School Educators),and NAMSE (National Association of Minority Students and Educators), to effect such programs as The BEST System.

Further, the following is earnestly offered:

> Whereas a stable and beneficial system of comprehensive education for the people of the United States of America has not yet evolved;
>
> And, whereas the Black people of this country have been further victimized by the victory of integrated education;
>
> And, whereas a liberating system of comprehensive education for the Black people of this country can never be a political priority for the ruling class;
>
> And, whereas there can be no self-definition, self-fulfillment, or even self-preservation for a people without self-determination,
>
> The authors propose that critical Black organizations, educators, and spokespersons ally and assume, forthwith, leadership to formalize the methodological and directional bases of and the politics for implementing a national agenda for the comprehensive education of the Black people of this country.

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NOTES

[1]W. E. B. DuBois, The Education of Black People, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 67.

[2]Carter G. Woodson, Mis-education of the Negro (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1933, p. 2.

[3]DuBois, p. 74.

[4]Woodson, p. xxxi.

[5]Robert Blauner, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt," Social Problems, 16, No. 4 (Spring, 1969), p. 393.

[6]Wade W. Nobles, "Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self-Concept," in Black Psychology, ed. Reginald L. Jones (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 99-105.

[7]Maryland State Board for Higher Education, A Plan to Assure Equal Postsecondary Educational Opportunity 1980-1985, p. 4.

[8]Maryland State Board for Higher Education, pp. 60-62.

[9]William E. Cross, Jr., "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience," Black World, July 1971, p. 17.

[10]Karen Dugger, "Correlates of Radical Political Consciousness: A Comparison of Blacks and Whites," Diss. Kent State University 1981.

[11]Lerone Bennett, Jr., The Challenge of Blackness (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 44, 40, 36.